Cloth and Human Experience. **ANNETTE B. WEINER and JANE SCHNEIDER, eds. Smithsonian Series in Ethnographic Inquiry. IVAN KARP and WILLIAM L. MERRILL, eds. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989. xv + 431 pp., figures, tables, notes, references, index. $39.95 (cloth).**

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"Cloth," in the dozen essays brought together in this stimulating, handsome volume, ranges from Samoan pandanus mats to *ikat* textiles of eastern Indonesia; from silk shrouds of Madagascar to Inca feathered cloaks; from Sikh turbans to wild tree fibers of ancient Japan. What links these essays is a concern with, in Annette Weiner's phrase, "taking cloth seriously."

Readers who might be wary of the broad scope suggested by the title would do well to read the lucid introduction, in which Weiner and Schneider argue that cloth must be understood as a form of communication: worn or displayed, it may disclose or conceal, differentiate or homogenize. As a repository for prized fibers, dyes, and artistry, it represents links to the past and serves as the wealth of political elites. As metaphor, it is almost infinitely rich, an analog for generativity, connectedness, and tying (the social "fabric"), but also for fragility and transience. Cloth eventually fades and disintegrates and is often linked with death as well as birth. Penelope weaves her shroud by day and unravels it by night, seeking to halt time.

Cloth not only symbolizes but also serves to consolidate social relations and mobilize political power. Weiner and Schneider point to four domains in which this is evident: manufacture; bestowal and exchange; investiture and kingship; and clothing. Capitalist production, they argue, reordered cloth's symbolic potential as manufacture ceased to be infused with spiritual value and reproductive analogies, and dress and adornment grew as an expressive domain with the rise of fashion capitalism. They suggest however that "pre-capitalist" cloth may reemerge with subversive anticolonial intent (as in Gandhi's India). As the essays reveal, old cloth may be put to new (nonsubversive) uses too: modern states lay claim to traditional cloth as "national treasure;" or modern capitalists revive peasant production for foreign markets (Mexican "wedding blouses").

All the essays in Part I, on small-scale societies, treat cloth as a potent symbol and apt medium for expressing fundamental human and societal concerns: with birth, death, exchange, and power. The most straightforward of these papers is Patricia Darish's account of why the Kuba of Zaire dress their dead in raffia textiles. Complex and intriguing analyses are presented by the other authors in this section. Weiner, for example, compares exchanges in the Trobriands and in Samoa and argues persuasively that cloth is the agent by which kinship identities are translated into political authority. In Samoa, relatively durable fine mats (in contrast to the impermanent banana-leaf skirts and bundles of the Trobriands) absorb value with the passage of time and are hoarded by political elites of ranking clans to facilitate their claims to the past. In Madagascar, Gillian Feeley-Harnik explores the crucial role of cloth in spirit possession among the Sakalava. Commoners are possessed by royal spirits who must be cajoled to identify themselves with offerings, incense, songs, and being wrapped into an appropriate silk cloth. But, like speaking, clothing may both substantiate identity *and* reveal falsity; "wrapping the ancestors" allows the Sakalava to play upon the ambiguities (the "turnings") inherent in social and political life.

A symbolic system rife with ambiguities is also found on the Indonesian island of Sumba, where Janet Hoskins studied indigo dyers, cloth production, and gender symbolism. The secret cult of dying, practiced by Kodi women past childbearing age, reveals complex metaphoric associations between processes of dying and sexual reproduction: cloth within the dye pot is equated with child within the womb and (later) daughter in the home. In each equation women are linked to cloth's ephemeral life-cycle; children, like cloths, are only semidurable. Women "sing the blues," laments associated with indigo, expressing ambivalence toward creative processes that inevitably entail separation and loss.

Ironic notes begin to sound in Part II, "Capitalism and the Meanings of Cloth." Ronald Waterbury describes the emergence of a "putting-out" system to produce Oaxacan "wedding blouses" in response to a tourist market that has developed since the late 1960s. Poor village women never wear such blouses but merely embroider squares, to be assembled by others into "authentic" items. The origins of such shifts in labor and their meanings are explored in a fascinating essay by Jane Schneider which links the rise of linen manufacture in 17th- and 18th-century Europe to changes in the nature of fairies, dwarfs, and other "little people" in the landscape. Why, asks Schneider, do formerly benevolent spirits become demonic? How to explain the appearance of Rumpelstiltskin, who helps the daughter spin flax into gold (and marry the king) but in exchange demands her firstborn child? Schneider shows how promoters of linen manufacture "stirred up" young women to compete for wages, prizes, and decent husbands. Hence the ambivalence of the tales, which juxtapose marriage opportunities with impossible spinning tasks and may be read as warnings for daughters of the poor too readily entangled in a quicksand of debts and obligations.

If the spirit world turns against spinning women in these flaxen tales, depriving them of reproductive capacity and control, Dutch artists of this period depict profoundly contradictory views of women, as Linda Stone-Ferrier shows: exemplary, virtuous

spinners; lascivious lace-makers; or cavorting characters in topsy-turvey spinning rooms where foolish men (Jesuits, Spanish generals) spin yarn with little devils by their sides.

Questions of power emerge in Part III, on cloth in large-scale societies. John Murra's account of Inka cloth suggests its multiple purposes, particularly its "magico-military importance." In return for cloth from Cusco, peasants were obliged to give weavings of their own. The paradox of the gift-laden conqueror drew on notions of reciprocity as it established future dependency; the "gift" became a statement of the peasant's conquered status.

Two essays explore the political uses of cloth in colonial and postcolonial India. Bernard Cohn traces British efforts to exploit the symbolic import of how one dressed, and to assert their otherness. As the colonizers moved toward "orientalizing" their subjects, promoting exotic military dress (for example, "turbanizing" the Sikhs), lavish costumes, jewels, and displays, Indians increasingly began to dress as Englishmen. Gandhi himself experimented with various forms of dress, as Susan Bean shows, and only gradually gave up the image of the English gentleman. When he did, however, it came with his comprehension of the semiotics and the economics of cloth, and he was able to transform homespun cotton and spinning wheels into symbols of India that transcended rich and poor, Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim. As Cohn points out, he also transformed cloth, particularly the small white "Gandhi cap," into a sign of rebellion, a critique of 150 years of colonial rule.

In the final essay, Louise Cort is concerned with the persistence and revival of vegetable fibers used in archaic Japanese and Okinawan cloth production. Such cloth has survived to varying degrees in remote mountain regions (where it plays a minor economic role), in sacred state rituals (particularly imperial accession, where "rough cloth" is paired with "smooth cloth" to symbolize the harmonizing of opposing elements) and through recent revivals. Competing claims to "archaic" cloth are made simultaneously by the Folk Craft Movement, the Japanese government, and Okinawan weavers who define production of such cloth as *resistance* to Japanese cultural and economic domination.

***Northern Athapaskan Art: A Beadwork Tradition.* KATE C. DUNCAN. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1989. 224 pp., plates, figures, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. $45.00 (cloth).**

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Discussions of the artistic heritage of northwestern North America usually leave Athapaskan aesthetics overshadowed by the monumental works of their coastal neighbors. Tlingit, Haida, and Tshimshian carvers, it is sometimes argued, were able to develop their distinctive art styles at least partly because of the regular availability of salmon and marine resources, resulting in permanent winter villages where specialists could develop their talents. Interior Athapaskan hunters had to be prepared to be mobile and to carry their art, their mythology, and their intellectual culture in their heads rather than on their backs.

Kate Duncan has given us a document that puts marginalized Athapaskan art at the center of current debates about material culture. Based on her extensive research in northern Athapaskan communities and her persistent tracking of the visible material heritage of these cultures through Canadian, American, and European museums, she has documented the intricacy, the stylistic variations, and the historical changes in the decorative traditions in northern Athapaskan aesthetic forms. Mobility may have altered the kind of representation—as seen in decorative embellishment of everyday objects rather than large-scale carving; however, the geographical variations and historical changes suggest that this is a more complex artistic tradition than we have formerly understood.

Duncan relies on ethnohistorical methods—archival records, photographs, museum collections, oral interviews—to trace the use of particular materials and designs. The significance of her book is immediately evident in the invaluable visual reproductions it includes. Forty-four color plates and almost 200 in black and white, all precisely identified, provide a parallel text to the written analysis. Photographs of items in museums are juxtaposed with historical reproductions showing people in the days when decorated clothing, bags, and sashes were part of everyday life and with pictures of contemporary artists at work. Detailed line drawings give unambiguous demonstrations of *how* quills and beads are fastened to hides, how flossing techniques are accomplished, how motifs are combined and recombined in different areas. Even though the book is primarily a study of form and style, themes are presented in a human context showing continuity from 19th-century work to the present.

She begins with an account of what is known about precontact decorative traditions in the northwest. Highly stylized and largely geometric, early work impressed visitors who repeatedly commented on the sewn and woven quillwork. Glass beads and designs were introduced from different directions and from different sources—Russians from the west, British Hudson's Bay traders from the east, and French missionaries and nuns with their own biases about the Christianizing influence of needlework for women. In each area, new ideas and designs were adopted in ways that reflect the dynamic process of contact, but they were applied within clearly established traditions.

If the processes of contact can be clearly reconstructed, the regional aesthetic and stylistic variations are more subtle. At the heart of the book is Duncan's identification of six distinct regional traditions which she distinguishes by analyzing motif construction, relationships between motifs, and use of color. The ornate, precise, predictable floral style that becomes elaborated in the Great Slave Lake-Mackenzie River region she suggests, implies adherence to strictly prescribed, preexisting rules. Further south and west in the Liard River, where women worked in greater isolation from Europeans, the floral patterns are more muted, and remnants of aboriginal geometric design are more visible. The Yukon-Tanana tradition is highly experimental: